

# High school track project hits another hurdle

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The Half Moon Bay High School track improvement project will be delayed another summer to accommodate a full environmental impact review that is expected to take eight months.

Cabrillo Unified School District Superintendent Tony Roehrick confirmed that construction would not occur this summer. He has previously indicated that the district would go through a more stringent process under the California Environmental Quality Act to ensure it had considered all potential environmental impacts. Cabrillo granted itself an exemption to CEQA with its first version of track and field improvement plans, but rescinded that exemption after it withdrew the project. An anonymous group known as Advocates for Open Government also filed suit against Cabrillo in San Mateo County Superior Court over its CEQA exemption.

“It feels as though the changes that are in the plan are just not massive infrastructure changes happening; this is really to enable us to be able to compete and do the things our kids want to do,” said Mike Inglis, a Half Moon Bay High track team coach and Half Moon Bay Cougar Boosters board secretary. “It’s just been a very disappointing process to go through.”

That process has undergone further scrutiny in recent months after the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights opened an investigation into the high school field’s accessibility for persons with disabilities. The case is one of two currently active concerning Cabrillo. The other involves “issues of discrimination in evaluation and placement, the implementation of free appropriate public education and the administration of discipline,” according to the U.S. Department of Education. Roehrick said in an email that case is unrelated to the field issues and concerns a special education student.

The cases were opened on June 16 and July 2, 2014, respectively.

A Department of Education spokesperson declined further comment, saying it could not provide case-specific information for open investigations.

In a prepared statement sent to the Review on Monday, Advocates for Open Government confirmed it asked the Office for Civil Rights to look into the matter of Americans with Disabilities Act compliance issues at Half Moon Bay High’s track in May. The release went on to say that AFOG is “delighted to find that our citizen inquiry has led to real action that will benefit the public.”

Several ADA compliance issues were identified by the Division of State Architect in June. Cabrillo incorporated fixes into its revised project plans approved by the school board in September. While Roehrick says that the Division of State Architect and the Office for Civil Rights have agreed on nearly all of the changes that Cabrillo should impose, the district has been waiting to hear whether another addition will be required — a wheelchair-accessible path on the west side of the track. Cabrillo had proposed an alternative in which the track would be used as a pathway when not in use for a track meet, or the visitors' bleachers would be closed during a track event, which DSA considered a good solution, Roehrick said.

But the Office for Civil Rights has suggested that would not be acceptable, Roehrick said. He added that Cabrillo expects to receive a formal letter from the agency outlining a negotiated resolution this week.

Installing the path would cost an estimated \$600,000, raising the total project cost to around \$2 million. The additional cost would come out of the total Measure S allocations for Half Moon Bay High.

"In order to complete a path of travel around the oval, we would have to remove the fence and trees and build a retaining wall to support the path of travel," Roehrick said. "There is no alternative that would be reasonable to consider, given the budget."

Roehrick emphasized that Cabrillo is committed to resolving these ADA issues and that the district will comply with federal requirements.

The Half Moon Bay High track improvement project was incorporated into the facility master plan in 2013. Administrators say it is necessary in order for the school to host track meets. It includes the installation of new synthetic turf and sports equipment, modification to underground drainage and other refurbishments. The facility master plan addresses how to spend \$81 million in bond funds from the passage of Measure S in 2012.

Inglis said that making the track more accessible for people with disabilities is a benefit of the project being delayed, but questioned AFOG's motivation.

"The ADA issues are real," Inglis said. "It just feels as though that was never the real issue as we understand it to begin with; now it has become the real issue."

Inglis added that, despite the setback, the booster club is optimistic that the project will eventually be completed.

"Work has been done at the high school over the last four to five years to provide some really excellent facilities, and I think that's going to continue even with these setbacks," he said.